

Mr. Danon (Israel):

Before I begin, I must respond to the hateful lies of the Palestinian representative about the Palestinian prisoners. Marwan Barghouti, the leader of the striking prisoners, is a terrorist and S/PV.7929 The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question a convicted murderer. Mr. Barghouti has overseen dozens of suicide bombings and the murder of innocent civilians. He was arrested and tried in a fair and open trial.

He was convicted of direct involvement in the murder of five people, including three men at a seafood restaurant, a monk driving to his monastery and Yoela Chen, a mother of two children. Glorifying terrorists not only distances us from peace, it dishonours the memories of the innocent victims. I would like to congratulate the United States for a successful term at the presidency of the Security Council this month. Israel appreciates the clear moral stand and basic respect for fairness that you have brought to that role. For the past 17 years the Council meets regularly to discuss the situation in the Middle East under the false assumption that all the ills of the region can be traced to Israel. When it comes to the Middle East, the Council is stuck repeating the same statements instead of seeking new ways forward to bring stability to our part of the world.

The truth is that in a region filled with brutal dictatorships and an endless disregard for civil rights and human lives, Israel remains the one beacon of hope. We are still the only true democracy in our region and the only country where people are truly free regardless of their race, religion, gender or sexual orientation. Quite simply, Israel is a true partner in the fight against terrorism and for positive change in the Middle East. There is no denying that the Middle East is in disarray. States are dissolving, dictators are using horrific weapons against their own citizens and terrorists are killing innocent people. We welcome the American Ambassador's insistence that today's meeting actually discuss those real causes of so much instability in the Middle East. Let me be clear. There is one country that sows dangerous chaos throughout the Middle East. Where there is terror, where there is death, where there is complete disregard for human life, there is Iran. Just a few weeks ago we witnessed the most horrific manifestation of Iran's influence in Syria.

Our hearts ached as we saw the horrible pictures of children, even babies, gassed by the Syrian regime. It was devastating. What kind of leader does this to his own citizens? What kind of monster does this to his fellow human beings? Israel fully supports the American strike on the Al-Assad regime. It was a moral stance on horrific crimes against humanity. Now is the time for the international community to finally fulfil its 2013 pledge and honour its commitment to remove all chemical weapons from Syria. There is no doubt that the primary blame for these crimes lies with Damascus. But at the same time we must not forget that Tehran is an accomplice to the atrocities taking place every single day in Syria. Al-Assad and his henchmen are puppets of the Iranians, propped up with their funding, trained by their military advisers and armed with their weapons. Iran's influence in Syria can be found everywhere, from the militias roaming the cities to Iranian attempts to build a port in the Mediterranean.

We in Israel know firsthand about Iran's attempts to spread terror and violence throughout the region. We have presented the Council with our latest intelligence about the terror organization Hizbullah in Lebanon. We showed in great detail how their rockets are aimed at Israeli homes, schools and offices. This Iranian proxy entrenched along our northern border is placing its weapons in homes, mosques and hospitals with the intention of once again committing a double war crime — targeting our civilians while using Lebanese women and

children as human shields. We continue to warn that Hizbullah has increased its stockpile from a mere 6,000 rockets and missiles in 2006 to almost 150,000 even more advanced weapons today. Where do these weapons come from? Iran, of course.

The Al-Quds Force trains Hizbullah fighters, funnels money to them and directly provides the terrorists with those deadly weapons. We also know that Hizbullah is constantly improving the range and accuracy of their rockets and now are capable of targeting 90 per cent of my country. Hizbullah is also growing stronger politically. Senior leaders in the Lebanese Government have recently voiced support for those terrorists and some have even gone as far as to describe Hizbullah as a legitimate force in Lebanon. Instead of working with the international community to implement resolution 1701 (2006), those extremists are drowning out the moderate voices in Lebanon who wish to realize the true potential of their country. Hizbullah is not only threatening the delicate calm on our border but endangering the chance of Lebanon ever becoming a stable and peaceful State. Iran has stopped at nothing to arm Hizbullah. It sends arms on convoys over land, tries to smuggle them in from the sea and even unabashedly places them on civilian airlines — such as Mahan Air — and flies them into Damascus and Beirut.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question Iran does not only threaten our region through proxies. It also does so directly by supporting terror throughout the Middle East and continuing their ballistic missile tests. Those tests are in total defiance of the international community and the Council has clearly stated that Iran is “not to undertake any activity related to ballistic missiles.” (resolution 2231 (2015), Annex B, para. 3). Yet, since resolution 2231 (2015) was adopted, Iran has conducted at least 14 ballistic missile tests. The Iranians have not hidden their intentions. In fact, just two days ago they wrote on one of their missiles, “Death to Israel”. That same violent call for Israel’s destruction, written on that missile, can be found in the Hamas charter. Let me remind the Council that Hamas is Iran’s proxy. It rules the Gaza Strip and holds the people of that region hostage.

The founding document of Hamas states that “there is no solution for the Palestinian question except through jihad”. As the Council knows, Israel withdrew completely from the Gaza Strip in 2005. We did so in the hope that the Palestinians would create a thriving economy and abandon the path of terror. We destroyed every Israeli home, reduced every synagogue to rubble and even removed every Jewish grave. Sadly, those hopes for the possibility of peace and better lives for Israelis and Palestinians were dashed. Hamas took over the Gaza Strip and has spent millions of dollars — much of it stolen from foreign humanitarian aid — on rockets, guns and terror tunnels. Meanwhile, the Palestinian people continue to suffer. Almost every week, we uncover a new incident of Hamas manipulating the goodwill of the international community.

Employees of recognized humanitarian organizations have been caught aiding terror infrastructure. Food and goods meant for the people of Gaza have been diverted to the black market, where they are sold for funds to buy arms. And official employees of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East not only incite violence against Israelis but also serve simultaneously as Hamas officials. In the decade that has passed since we left Gaza, Israel has been forced on numerous occasions to fight Hamas and defend our people. During the last round of fighting in Operation Protective Edge, in 2014, Hamas unleashed over 3,000 rocket attacks on Israeli civilians. At the same time, it used sophisticated terror tunnels to try to attack our border communities. Its plan is

as simple as it is evil. It aims to attack kindergartens and community centres with the hope of massacring as many innocent people as possible.

Members of the Council must understand that Hamas is unfortunately leading us to the next conflict. Since the end of Operation Protective Edge, we estimate that Hamas has increased its arsenal to over 12,000 rockets. At the same time, it has continued to dig its terror tunnels, day in and day out. Many of these tunnels, which stretch into Israeli territory, are as long as 2.5 kilometres, which is longer than the Lincoln Tunnel connecting New York and New Jersey under the Hudson River. The Lincoln Tunnel is used by millions of people to come to their jobs and then go home to their families. In contrast, the Hamas tunnels are intended to kidnap and kill as many Israelis as possible. I have here an image illustrating the reach and scope of Hamas' network of terror tunnels from the last operation in Gaza. The green line is the border. Here are the openings of the tunnels in Gaza. Notice how they use civilian homes and hospitals to hide the entrances. Here is where these tunnels end up: next to Nahal Oz, Saad, Kfar Aza, just metres from Israeli towns. They spend millions of dollars on these tunnels. Council members may ask how Hamas continues to arm and replenish its weapons supply.

The answer lies in the words of Hamas leader, Mousa Abu Marzook, who said last June that “[t]he support offered by Iran to the Palestinian resistance — be it in logistics, training or funds — is unmatched and beyond the capabilities of other countries. Iran’s support and backing to the resistance and the Palestinian cause is clear”. The Hamas representative does not exaggerate this connection. Iran’s Foreign Ministry spokesman, Hossein Jaber Ansari, said that “resistance movements are part of Iran’s foreign policy”. We need to think about that. To so many members of the United Nations, foreign aid to Gaza means donations to UNICEF or to the Red Cross. This is money that goes towards clean water, education, health. For Iran, foreign aid means supplying deadly missiles and training terrorists.

We welcome the new position that has been proposed with respect to the Security Council and its meetings about the Middle East. We know from our own experience that there is only one way forward for those who really want peace in our region. As S/PV.7929 The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question 20/04/2017 10/65 17-10629 we have said time and again, peace between Israelis and Palestinians will not come from meaningless manoeuvring in international bodies, and it most definitely will not result from one-sided resolutions here in the Security Council. The chance for real peace to be pursued will only come when the Palestinians abandon terror, end incitement and finally return to the negotiating table.

More importantly, the chance for peace and stability for our region depends on the Security Council, and the international community as a whole, recognizing real threats when we see them. I ask a simple question to those who insist on keeping the focus here in the Security Council on Israel: Is Israel at fault for the spread of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant? Is Israel to blame for the dire situation in Yemen? Is Israel responsible for the daily massacres in Syria? The answer is a resounding “no”. We welcome efforts to widen the scope of the meetings of the Security Council to focus on the real dangers in the Middle East. The time has come to finally put an end to the obsessive focus on Israel. The time has come to stop this scapegoating of the Jewish State for every war and conflict in our region. The Council should remain focused on stopping the countries that support sadistic dictators who gas their own people.

The time has come for the Council to speak in a clear voice and finally classify Hizbullah and Hamas as terrorist organizations. We are warning that an alliance of evil with Iran at its centre is spreading throughout the Middle East. They seek to spread chaos, terror and instability through a region once known as the cradle of civilization. We call upon the Council to condemn Iran's dangerous behaviour. The good news is that Israel is no longer alone in standing up to these threats. Countries of good conscience throughout our region are putting the chance for peace and security and the hope for a better future for their people ahead of the conflicts of the past. It is also Israel's hope that this body will begin to seek true moral clarity when it comes to the Middle East. Only then will the Security Council finally be effective in fulfilling its stated role of maintaining international peace and security for the world.